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SUBJECT: SUCCESSFUL EVACUATION OF AMCITS, FAMILIES FROM GAZA

REF: 08 JERUSALEM 2297

11. (U) SUMMARY. On January 2, ConGen Jerusalem successfully evacuated 27 AMCITS and AMCIT family members from Gaza. The evacuees transited through Jordan en route to their final destinations. Post continues to receive calls from additional AMCITS in Gaza seeking assistance in leaving. END SUMMARY.

EVACUATION A SUCCESS
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12. (SBU) ConGen Jerusalem, with assistance from Embassy Tel Aviv and Embassy Amman, organized the evacuation of 27 AMCITS and AMCIT family members from Gaza on January 2. Of the 34 people who signed up for evacuation, seven decided at the last minute not to leave.

13. (SBU) Of the 27 people who were evacuated, two held only US citizenship, 14 were dual Palestinian-Americans, two were possible dual Palestinian-Americans without documentation, three had pending immigration applications, and six were family members holding only Palestinian citizenship. Although the Government of Israel (GOI) initially was unwilling to permit the evacuation of non-US passport holders, in the end, all the names on the list were approved. The Government of Jordan, on an exceptional basis, agreed to permit all evacuees entry, even in cases where they possessed expired or invalid travel documents.

14. (SBU) When Consular staff arrived at the Erez crossing between Israel and Gaza, they were ushered immediately into a hardened shelter because of incoming missiles (which eventually landed in and around Ashkelon, north of Erez in Israel). Because the GOI Foreign Ministry had announced the night before that the GOI was permitting the exit from Gaza of foreign passport holders, several dozen journalists were present covering the departures. Over 300 people were attempting to cross, including 180 Russian nationals and citizens from Norway, Turkey, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Denmark.

15. (SBU) Despite the chaotic situation at Erez, CONOFFs were able to clear the evacuees by 1130 local time and board them on the bus for transit to the Allenby Bridge crossing to Jordan. GOI officials at the crossing were helpful in processing the evacuees, and minimal problems arose. The US evacuees were among the first to leave Erez, and crossed the border into Jordan at approximately 1600 local time.

LACK OF VALID DOCUMENTS AN ISSUE
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16. (SBU) Many of the evacuees lacked valid documentation. Eight of the 16 AMCITS held expired US passports, and many of the Palestinians had only expired Palestinian passports, or none at all. Despite this, all were permitted exit from Gaza and entry into Jordan. En route from Gaza to Jordan, ConGen personnel assisted those needing US passports in completing the forms. Once evacuees arrived in Jordan, Embassy Amman staff assisted them in applying for emergency passports for onward travel. The two undocumented possible Palestinian-Americans, both

minors, were subsequently confirmed to be AMCITs and issued consular reports of birth abroad by ConGen Jerusalem, in cooperation with Embassy Amman.

COMPLICATED CASES

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¶17. (SBU) While some of the evacuee cases were clear-cut, others were complicated because one or both parents were not AMCITs, or only some of the children were. In a particularly difficult case, the legal permanent resident father of six children died of cancer in a Gaza hospital on December 27. The mother holds only Palestinian citizenship, but four of the six children are AMCITs. Since the father's naturalization was pending and he had apparently filed no petitions for his non-citizen family members, the mother is not eligible for U.S. immigration. The oldest child in the family told CONOFF that their uncle, the father's brother, was killed in a missile strike on December 27 while trying to find an open pharmacy to buy medicine for the father. The mother and six children were successfully evacuated on January 2 and are currently in Jordan, where Embassy Amman is working to identify options for the family.

¶18. (U) Post continues to collect names of AMCITs seeking to leave Gaza, should there be another opportunity for an evacuation.

Walles